



The Reforestation Act of 2019 (S. 3106) addresses the reforestation needs within our U.S. forestland. With a backlog of 1.3 million forestland acres in need of planting, this legislation provides additional authorities to prioritize reforestation projects in forests damaged by events such as wildfires, drought, insects, and diseases.

The Act also provides \$60 million (an increase of \$30 million) per year without increasing fees or tariffs and draws from an existing revenue source – the Reforestation Trust Fund.

The Act requires the US Forest Service (USFS) to prioritize and reduce the backlog of 1.3 million forestland acres in need of reforestation within ten years.

Background. America’s forests, including those in urban areas, play a valuable role throughout the United States. They provide a basis for everything from wildlife habitat, clean air and soil, and a vital source of carbon sequestration, to areas for recreation and job creation—activities that are worth billions of dollars each year. Unfortunately, the USFS is unable to keep up with replanting needs. Under current funding and infrastructure restraints, USFS is capable of reforesting only about 200,000 acres per year—which is only 15% of tree planting backlog. These understocked forests can have a profound ripple effect on the surrounding environment and local economies that depend on healthy, functioning forests.

Impacts of wildfires. For the past ten years, wildfires have torn across the United States, burning an average of 6.6-million acres of forestland—the equivalent of a Massachusetts-sized piece of land *every year*. In 2015 and 2017 alone, over 10-million acres were burned as a result of the two worst wildfire years since the 1950s. Wildfires threaten tree stock, but also destroy public and private structures, cause fatalities, reduce forest structure and function, degrade soil health, and add carbon dioxide (CO₂) to the atmosphere. The increasing frequency and severity of wildfires also creates additional barriers to forest regrowth, with many severely burned areas located too far from the surviving forest to naturally regenerate. The U.S. Forest Service estimates that roughly 80% of the replanting needs within our national forests are due to wildfires.

Impacts of insects, disease. Further exacerbating forest loss are insects and disease, which damaged or killed trees on over 11 million additional acres in 2018, with Emerald Ash Borer in the east and Spruce Beetles in the west identified as main culprits. As a forestry professor at Purdue University described, insects and diseases in general “are like fire,” where “they consume everything in their path.” As a result of these losses from insects and diseases, the number of trees killed released 6 million tons of carbon into the atmosphere, the equivalent of the tailpipe emissions of 4.4 million cars.

Benefits of Reforestation. Science continues to show that forests play a significant role in protecting our environment. Restoring forests can sequester carbon and stabilize ecosystems. In fact, our national forests currently offset 14-15% of the total U.S. carbon emissions. Healthy forests also clean the air and water, provide habitat for wildlife, and create jobs and recreation opportunities. When we lose forests to events like fires, insects, and disease, we lose the widespread benefits they create.

Our National Forests also provide a substantial number of jobs and income for the United States. [According to the USDA](#), in 2016, our National Forests supported an estimated 345,000 jobs that generated over \$16.5 Billion of income.

Legislation Summary

The good news is, we can equip the USFS with the tools to replant national forests, creating jobs and offsetting carbon emissions. The goal of the Reforestation Act of 2019 is to reduce the number of disaster-impacted national forestland acres in need of replanting by amending four underlying statutes to better align them with current needs:

- **Direct the USFS to develop a plan to address its backlog of replanting needs on national forestlands within 10 years:** The Act amends the Forest Rangeland Renewable Resources Planning Act of 1974 to require USFS to develop a plan and cost estimate to address the backlog of replanting needs on national forestlands by 2029. To aid in how to prioritize the backlog, the Act directs the USFS to prioritize land that has is in need of reforestation due to unplanned events, such as wildfire, insects, and disease.
- **Provide additional funding to tackle the backlog:** The Act amends the Reforestation Trust Fund to double the amount of annual funds that are authorized to be used by USFS to address its reforestation needs. The Reforestation Trust Fund is funded through tariff collections on imported wood products. This provision does not increase tariffs, but instead uses funds that are already being collected consistent with the tariff rates under the Harmonized Tariff Schedule of the United States.
- The Fund currently receives a rolling ten-year average of \$97M per year, and this legislation would double the current authorization – from \$30 million per year to \$60 million per year – of funding that can be taken from the Reforestation Trust Fund for replanting needs. Any funds that are not used from the Fund are deposited into the General Treasury. Reforestation priority would be given to understocked national forests that are unlikely to naturally regenerate following an unplanned adverse event.
- **Direct the USFS to reduce delays in tackling reforestation projects through expanded Stewardship Contracting:** The Act amends the Healthy Forests Restoration Act to ensure that stewardship contracts can include reforestation projects following an unplanned adverse event, such as a wildfire.
- **Encourages Federal, State, Tribal Partnerships:** The Act expands the Good Neighbor Authority, a policy authorizing USFS to enter into forest management agreements with state and local forest agencies, to include reforestation following an unplanned adverse event, such as a wildfire, drought, disease, or insects. As a result, the USFS will be able to partner with states and Tribes on reforestation projects.